



**COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA ITEM TRANSMITTAL**

(1) DEPARTMENT Clerk-Recorder	(2) MEETING DATE 5/4/2021	(3) CONTACT/PHONE Tommy Gong, Clerk-Recorder (805) 781-5080	
(4) SUBJECT Submittal of a report on elections and voting systems in San Luis Obispo County, and request to provide direction to staff regarding which election model to use for future elections. All Districts.			
(5) RECOMMENDED ACTION It is recommended that the Board: <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> 1. Receive and file a report on elections and voting systems in San Luis Obispo County, and 2. Provide direction to staff regarding which election model to use for future elections. </div>			
(6) FUNDING SOURCE(S) N/A	(7) CURRENT YEAR FINANCIAL IMPACT \$0.00	(8) ANNUAL FINANCIAL IMPACT \$0.00	(9) BUDGETED? N/A
(10) AGENDA PLACEMENT <input type="checkbox"/> Consent <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing (Time Est. _____) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Board Business (Time Est 60 mins)			
(11) EXECUTED DOCUMENTS <input type="checkbox"/> Resolutions <input type="checkbox"/> Contracts <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinances <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A			
(12) OUTLINE AGREEMENT REQUISITION NUMBER (OAR) N/A		(13) BUDGET ADJUSTMENT REQUIRED? BAR ID Number: N/A <input type="checkbox"/> 4/5th's Vote Required <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	
(14) LOCATION MAP N/A	(15) BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT? No	(16) AGENDA ITEM HISTORY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A Date _____	
(17) ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE REVIEW Morgan Torell			
(18) SUPERVISOR DISTRICT(S) All Districts.			



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Tommy Gong, Clerk-Recorder (805) 781-5080

DATE: 5/4/2021

SUBJECT: Submittal of a report on elections and voting systems in San Luis Obispo County, and request to provide direction to staff regarding which election model to use for future elections. All Districts.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board:

1. Receive and file a report on elections and voting systems in San Luis Obispo County, and
2. Provide direction to staff regarding which election model to use for future elections.

DISCUSSION

The 2020 Presidential General Election was one for the ages. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, states and counties across the nation stepped up to the challenge of conducting the largest election ever in the modern era, in the most politically divisive landscape, with the addition of health and safety protocols. For San Luis Obispo County, herculean efforts were made to accommodate the new requirements in the Governor's Executive Order and subsequent legislation including:

- Sending every registered voter a ballot in the mail with ballot tracking;
- Converting from an Election Day polling place to a 4-Day Voter Service Center operation requiring much retooling of procedures and the addition of electronic equipment;
- Revamping election worker hiring and training; including direction for Health & Safety of Voters & Election Workers;
- Distributing PPE supplies and equipment;
- Implementing an extensive voter education and outreach program to inform the public about the numerous changes to the election.

County election staff performed admirably, and what resulted was the largest election ever for the County with a record-breaking number of registered voters and voter participation; a highly successful election that the County should be proud of.

At the same time, much debate has materialized after the election regarding voting systems and laws that regulate how elections are conducted and each state has its own established laws regarding elections. In California, the Election Code governs how elections are conducted in the state and is regulated by the state legislature, not by the

County. To that end, this report will include an overview of voting systems, their testing and certification protocol, and the procedures counties are required to perform to ensure their accuracy. A gauge on public confidence in election by residents of the County is included with strategies to boost confidence.

Secondly, the County is at a crossroads on how elections will be conducted in the future. During the March 2020 Primary Election, a traditional polling place election was conducted. During the November 2020 General Election, voter service centers were utilized which closely parallels the requirement of SB450, (the Voter's Choice Act or VCA). This report will also cover the differences between the two election models and staff requests direction from your Board regarding which election model to use in future elections.

High Level Overview of Voting Systems

At its core, a voting system facilitates ballot design, ballot tabulation, and reporting of election results. It may also include ballot manufacturing (commonly known as "ballot on demand"), and ballot marking technologies for voters with disabilities or voters in the military or living overseas. A voting system does not manage voter registration, candidate filing, incoming vote-by-mail processing, or signature checking to name a few election-related responsibilities which are facilitated by other systems.

Certification of voting systems is governed by Division 19 of the California Election Code. California Elections Code section 19202 specifies that no voting system may be purchased or used in a California election until the Secretary of State approves that system. Voting systems are certified by the California Secretary of State, Office of Voting Systems Technology Assessment (OVSTA). New voting systems applying for certification must undergo months of extensive testing which includes:

- Examination and testing of system software;
- Software source code review and evaluation;
- Hardware and software security penetration testing;
- Hardware testing under conditions simulating the intended storage, operation, transportation, and maintenance environments;
- Inspection and evaluation of system documentation; and
- Operational testing to validate system performance and functioning under normal and abnormal conditions.

Certification of voting systems is an ongoing requirement and effort. Major and minor updates to systems by voting system vendors must be recertified by the Secretary of State before the updates may be used to conduct an election.

Procurement

The County of San Luis Obispo used the GEMS voting system from 2000-2017. In September 2017, the Clerk-Recorder issued a request for proposals to replace the GEMS system. Four qualified proposals were received, which were reviewed by Clerk-Recorder staff, including in-house demonstrations that were viewed by members of the public and the Director of Information Technology. An objective review of the submissions resulted in Dominion Voting Systems being selected as the preferred vendor. The County entered a contract with Dominion Voting Systems on January 23, 2018 and has successfully conducted four statewide elections and one special election using their voting system technology since that time. Dominion Voting Systems technology used by the County of San Luis Obispo includes the Democracy Suite (provides core ballot design, scanning, tabulation, electronic adjudication, and reporting), Mobile Ballot Production ("ballot on demand"), ImageCast X accessible ballot marking, and ImageCast Remote accessible vote by mail ballot marking systems. Certification details for all these systems may be found on the Secretary of State OVSTA website at <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ovsta>.

Chain of Custody and Security of Certified Voting System

The “trusted build” of certified systems is under control of the Secretary of State and physically handed off from a Secretary of State staff member to an authorized individual from each county elections office. Once loaded on county hardware, all functions are validated and accepted by the county elections official.

County use of voting systems is governed by law, regulations, and certified use procedures. Among many other requirements, note that no part of a voting system shall be connected to the Internet at any time or shall be enabled for wireless communications (EC §19205). The San Luis Obispo Clerk-Recorder keeps the voting system in physically secure areas accessible only by authorized staff members and under 24x7 video surveillance.

Pre-Election Testing

Logic and accuracy (L&A) testing is conducted by each county prior to every election to verify that all ballots and equipment are configured and tabulating correctly. The San Luis Obispo Clerk-Recorder performs functional testing to ensure all equipment is functioning as expected and that the tabulation equipment is configured correctly for the current election with results reported in every consolidated precinct for polling (in-person) and vote by mail ballots. The functional test results are printed, backed up, then purged.

After confirming all results are reset to zero, two sets of logic and accuracy test ballots are tabulated on every polling tabulator and vote by mail tabulator. One set of ballots are pre-printed with the ovals filled with a test pattern of votes that helps the elections official validate the results. For example, an “LA3” test deck of ballots includes one vote for the first candidate in each contest, two votes for the second candidate in each contest, three votes for the third candidate, then the pattern starts over with one vote for the fourth candidate and so on. Every ballot type is included in the test deck to ensure every contest and contest choice is tested and validated. A second test deck with the same test pattern is produced from the ImageCast X ballot marking device (ICX) to validate the programming and tabulation of those ballots as well.

When the L&A testing is completed, reports and backups are run and the system remains in that state until the Clerk-Recorder meets with the Logic and Accuracy Board. This board consists of individuals who are not employed by the Clerk-Recorder but invited to participate in this important election preparation process. Past participants have included other County department heads or their designees and members of the Grand Jury. The Logic and Accuracy Board reviews the test ballots, the test results, and may ask to mark additional ballots to be tabulated and reported to see that the results are updated as expected. When satisfied, the members sign a certificate verifying the logic and accuracy testing has completed successfully. At this point the system is again backed up and results are purged. The system remains in this state until the time comes to start processing vote by mail ballots.

Ballot Tabulation

A zero report is produced and posted to the election web page prior to tabulating any voter ballots. Vote by mail ballots that have been signature verified and cleared for counting are removed and separated from the voters’ envelopes to maintain anonymity of each voter. Ballots are unfolded and inspected for any issues which prevent the ballots from being tabulated such as marks which could identify the voter, red ink which is not seen by the ballot scanners, tears or other damage, or ink in the timing marks or ballot identification barcode areas. Any such ballots are set aside to be duplicated (remade) by a team of three election staff members. Originals are clearly marked as VOID and duplicates are clearly marked as DUPLICATE with matching identification numbers. System and paper logs are maintained for all processes to track who is performing the work and to ensure the correct number of ballots are accounted for at each step of way. Only red pens are used around the ballots to prevent the possibility of inadvertently making a mark in a bubble on a ballot that could be picked up as a vote during tabulation. Inventory controls are used

to ensure all ballots that may be counted are counted, and counted only once. For example, vote by mail ballots are managed in bundles of 50 before, during, and after scanning and tabulation (until the late phases of the canvass when we are working with smaller numbers of ballots).

Ballot Adjudication

A key feature of the Dominion voting system is the adjudication module. This module allows two-member adjudication teams to review ballot images and adjust the system tabulation if needed to reflect voter intent. Ballots detected by the system to have no votes ("blank" ballots), overvotes (one or more contest with more choices marked than allowed for the contest), write-ins, or marginal marks (ovals filled below percentage threshold) are reviewed by election staff members who must agree on voter intent and any changes required as a result. For example, if a voter has consistently filled ovals on the ballot but crosses out an oval and fills another for a contest resulting in an overvote, the crossed-out vote will be removed making the remaining vote valid. If a voter consistently circled ovals rather than filling the ovals causing the system to detect a blank ballot, the adjudication team would mark votes according to the voter's intent so their votes will count. Every write-in vote is reviewed by the adjudication team so votes for qualified write-in candidates can be allocated to the appropriate candidate.

Tracking Voted Ballot Inventory

Because no results may be produced prior to 8:00 PM on Election Day, a "batches loaded" report is used after each ballot scanning session before that time to verify that the number of batches and ballots scanned matches the manual log sheets for each scanner and the ballot inventory sheet. After election night, the election summary report is also used before and after each ballot scanning session to confirm that the number of ballots cast has not changed since the last session and that it reflects the number of ballots scanned after the session. All results are unofficial until the completion of all election canvass activities and the certification of results by the County Clerk-Recorder.

Post-Election Audit

During the official canvass of every election a public one percent manual tally is performed to confirm the voting system tally (EC §15360). One percent of vote by mail ballot batches and of polling precinct batches are selected at random plus additional batches if necessary to ensure that every contest in the election is covered by the ballots to be manually tallied. In San Luis Obispo County, the manual tally is performed by multiple teams of four election staff members. For example, a team of four could verify one batch of 200 vote by mail ballots in about 8 hours for the November 2020 election. During the November 2020 canvass the manual tally of 2,599 ballots found two differences from the machine tally. One was the inadvertent removal of a YES vote on Proposition 15 during the adjudication process. The other was a NO vote on Proposition 24 as determined by the adjudication team whereas the manual tally team could not agree on voter intent. During each statewide election, a report on the 1% manual tally is provided to the Secretary of State office for review.

Public Observation

As required by law, these election processes are open to public observation. The Clerk-Recorder welcomes observers and the opportunity to demonstrate the integrity of election processes.

Public Confidence in Elections – Survey Results

On April 2, 2021, the Clerk-Recorder posted a Voter Survey on its public website. The survey was announced through a press release, promoted heavily through social media, and the Tribune chose to run an editorial piece on it, resulting in over 5,500 responses as of April 22, 2021. Fourteen questions were asked, including party affiliation, the voter's residence area, preference of voting by mail or in person, and the voter's confidence in the Elections process. This survey will remain open at www.slovote.com until late May when results will be updated prior to the County budget hearings.

- Q1: "How confident are you that your voters in the November 2020 election were counted accurately by the County Elections office?" – average response 8.72 (1-10 scale)
- Q2: "How confident are you in the overall integrity of the County Elections office?" – average response 8.69 (1-10 scale)

The public Voter Survey illuminated differences in voter confidence along party lines:

- Democratic Party: 3,156 respondents, average score Q1: 9.77; Q2: 9.70
- Republican Party: 752 respondents, average score Q1: 5.03; Q2: 5.24
- No Party Preference: 911 respondents, average score Q1: 8.53; Q2: 8.55

Plans to Increase Voter Confidence

Unfortunately, the fallout of mis- and disinformation questioning the validity of the election has challenged the foundations that democracy rests on, resulting in mistrust in the election process by the public. Democracy and elections provide the means for the peaceful transfer of power. It is widely recognized that rebuilding public trust in elections is of paramount importance. This must happen at multiple levels: local, state, and federal government. The media and community-based organizations will also be needed to restore public faith in our democracy. As a result, it is recognized that the County must continue the robust Voter Education and Outreach program that was established during this past election and maintain a social media presence to combat the misinformation and establish the County Elections Department as the legitimate source of election information.

The Elections Office has several models in place to help increase voter confidence in both our local and national elections. The Voter Survey has helped identify the areas in which the public is most interested.

- 57% of all respondents feel that more transparent processes that may be observed by the public would help increase voter confidence. For the November 2020 election, observers from both partisan and non-partisan groups came to the Elections office and were able to observe every part of the process, from receiving Vote by Mail ballots in the office, scanning envelopes, signature checking, opening the envelopes, processing the ballots, duplicating damaged or illegible ballots, adjudication of ballots, to the final tabulation and report of votes cast. The office has always been open to the public who wished to come watch behind the scenes.
- 47% of survey respondents feel that increased education and outreach is needed. For the November 2020 election cycle, a total of \$57,466 was spent on marketing, digital, radio and television ads. Behind the scenes videos were posted on social media, as well as a concerted and focused media campaign in conjunction with the Secretary of State.
- 40% expressed an interest in seeing more behind the scenes videos.
- 30% would like online videos explaining details related to elections.
- Other strategies suggested by survey respondents:
 - Regularly refute false information, repeating true messaging (statistically, 8-10 impressions are needed before a message is received by the listener).
 - Ask those concerned with the integrity of the election to volunteer.

- Increased education in schools; educate children on the elections process.
- Give all voters the ability to track their ballot.
- Concerted and credible official statements by government and community leaders.

Request for Audit of the County's Voting System and Election Changes

On March 4th, 2021, the Republican Party of San Luis Obispo made the request to subject the voting system that the County utilizes to tabulate its ballots to an audit by an independent testing laboratory. This involves providing physical access to the County's voting system components and imaging the hard drives. Such audits as requested are not authorized under California law (see California Election Code §§ 15360, 15365-15367, 17301, 17302).

The County does not have the legal authority to allow an audit or recount outside of the timeframes established by law related to an election. During the November 3rd 2020 General Election, after the canvass of the vote was completed and the results of the election were certified on November 25th, a recount could have been requested up to five days after certification. No recount was requested for any contest, and the deadline has since passed. According to Election Code §§ 17301 and 17302, the ballots and identification materials shall be kept by the elections official, unopened and unaltered for 22-months (federal elections) or 6-months (state and local elections) from the date of the election. As a matter of policy and best practice from a security standpoint, physical access to the tabulation systems is restricted only to selected Clerk-Recorder staff at all times.

In addition, any such audit is contractually prohibited. In this regard, the contract with the vendor, Dominion Voting Systems (DVS), states that the County shall not, without the prior written permission of DVS, transfer a copy of Dominion software onto any other storage device or hardware or otherwise copy the software in whole or in part except for purposes of system backup. These are standard contractual terms that were approved by County Purchasing and County Counsel.

The Republican Party of SLO and its members requested changes to future elections: in person voting (no VBM voting unless physical hardship), local precinct voting, use of voter ID, purging voter rolls, and paper ballots with hand counting of all ballots. These matters are governed by state election code, which the state legislature has the discretion to change with proposed bills. The county performs all voter maintenance activities required by state and federal law, including processing updates from Department of Motor Vehicles, United States Post Office, death records from state and local Public Health officials and other agencies. Based on hand tallying ballots during the 1% manual tally during the canvass, hand counting all ballots would be cost and time prohibitive to meet the reporting requirements of an election.

Finally, the request to employ members of various political parties in vote tabulation activities was made. Our temporary help staff as well as pollworkers are typically affiliated with various parties, but the primary directive for all staff is to maintain an apolitical and non-partisan position when involved with the duties of conducting the election.

Polling Places vs Voter Service Centers

The 2020 Presidential Election cycle was like no other in recent history with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Essentially, the recent November Presidential Election was conducted as a VBM/Voter Service Center election under the basic premise of the Voter's Choice Act (VCA). As a result, Clerk-Recorder staff have gained first-hand experience with the preparations of conducting such an election and have metrics to compare with past elections.

What is SB450?

California SB450, The Voters Choice Act (VCA), requires counties to send every registered voter a VBM ballot, install VBM ballot drop-off boxes throughout the county for voters to deposit their voted ballots (approximately 12 in our county), and instead of having polling places on Election Day (77 locations for 138 precincts in our county), a reduced number of vote centers would be open as early as 10 days before Election Day, including weekends and holidays (approximately 20 in our county).

A vote center is more sophisticated than a traditional polling place; it more closely resembles our election office operation extended to another 18 locations throughout the county. This requires computers and secured connectivity to our voter registration system and VoteCal, the statewide voter registration database with all unique ballot styles available or ballot on demand printing technology to print the appropriate ballot for each voter. A minimum of three accessible voting devices for voters with disabilities must be on hand. Lastly, it requires trained temporary staff to operate each vote center eight hours a day during this period and thirteen hours on Election Day. Pay rates would not be at a pollworker stipend but rather at hourly rates.

Temporary help staff is responsible for re-issuing lost or spoiled VBM ballots as well as Conditional Voter Registration (same day registration) for voters who missed the registration deadline. This requires checking on the status of voters throughout the state and ensuring they did not already vote elsewhere, getting them registered if needed, and issuing them provisional ballots which are verified during the canvass.

The VBM ballot drop-off boxes are required to be serviced daily by at least 2 people to maintain the integrity of the ballots, requiring additional staffing. Lastly, SB450 calls for extensive voter education and outreach plans to be implemented.

Differences Between Election Models

The 2020 election year provided the opportunity to conduct elections in two different administration models.

Polling Places Model

The March 2020 Presidential Primary election was conducted using the polling place in-person voting model as has always been the case in San Luis Obispo county. There were 137 consolidated precincts located at 76 polling places on Election Day. Twenty-one percent of voters (23,157) voted in person in the 2020 primary in our county while seventy-nine percent of voters (88,082) voted by mail. Voters who went to a polling place other than their assigned polling place had to vote provisionally so their eligibility to vote could be verified after Election Day after balancing and processing the paper rosters from all polling places. Each polling place had at least one accessible ballot marking device available as required by law; the only technology used at a polling place. The Clerk-Recorder also provided for the first time 14 vote by mail drop boxes in various locations throughout the county to provide voters additional options for returning vote by mail ballots.

Voters Choice Act Model

To provide for voter safety during the COVID-19 pandemic and state of emergency which was declared shortly after the March 2020 election, the County of San Luis Obispo conducted a "Voters Choice Act-like" in-person voting model for the November 2020 Presidential General election per Governor's Executive Orders and subsequent state legislation. This included:

- Every registered voter was sent a vote by mail ballot in the mail.

- Voters wishing to vote in person could visit the voter service center of their choice of 23 available across the county starting Saturday, October 31 through Election Day, November 3 (4 days at 23 in-person voting locations rather than 1 day of in-person voting at 76 polling places).
- Each voter service center had check-in equipment and secure remote connectivity to the County's voter registration database, ballot on demand printing technology, accessible ballot marking devices with back-up generators on standby allowing voters to vote at any of 23 voter service centers in the county. Extensive technology at each voter service center location extended virtually all voter services previously only available at the Clerk-Recorder offices to each location for four days.
- Voters could replace a damaged or lost vote by mail ballot as the system allows the workers to confirm the prior VBM ballot is not returned and to void it instantly so it cannot be returned. Similarly a voter could opt to vote a live, precinct ballot to be deposited without an envelope into the ballot box. The onsite technology allows the worker to confirm the voter's registration status, that a VBM ballot has not been returned, to void the outstanding VBM ballot, to print the correct precinct ballot on demand, while instantly updating the local and state voter registration databases to indicate the voter has voted.
- Vote by mail drop boxes were again made available throughout the county for convenience in returning vote by mail ballots.
- Clerk-Recorder staffed a command center to support election workers during the four days of voting and to dispatch IT or operational field support as needed.

Voter Turnout History

The 2020 Presidential Election was one for the ages in the County: 184,050 registered voters (approximately 6,000 more voters than the March Primary) and a historically high 88.35% turnout, the 4th highest in the state. Previously, the highest finish the County had achieved was 12th in the previous two Presidential Elections.

With a total of 162,615 ballots cast, 152,741 of them were VBM ballots (93.93%), with 9,874 ballots cast in person (6.07%). Voters overwhelmingly chose to vote by mail, due to a variety of reasons: concern for health and safety, convenience of a VBM ballot being sent to every voter, reduction of voting locations, potential lines at voter service centers, divisive political climate, etc. It should be noted that 81% of all County voters are registered as "permanent vote by mail" voters.

Of those VBM ballots: 48% utilized official Drop Boxes, 41% used the Post Office, 11% dropped off In Person. The reasons why varied: Concerns for delayed delivery at the USPS, notion that ballots dropped in a drop box are directly submitted to the elections department instead of through the USPS, and helping save postage for the County by utilizing a drop box instead of the Post Office. Utilizing drop boxes saved the County at least \$52,000.

For voters who voted in person, many more were able to vote a regular precinct ballot, since a voter service center operation vastly reduces the need to vote provisionally. Compared to 6500-7000 provisional ballots typically cast during a Presidential election, only 477 provisional ballots were cast last November. In addition, 1,841 Conditional Voter Registration (aka Same Day Registration) ballots were cast for voters who missed the registration deadline.

The final contributor to voter turnout was the robust voter education and outreach program that the department implemented to inform the public about the changes taking place during the election. Utilizing 40 personal appearances via Zoom meetings, radio and television advertisements, and digital marketing to draw viewers to the Clerk-Recorder Elections website, the County experienced a 57.4% increase in website activity over 2016 Presidential Election.

Details of Budget Augmentation Request to implement the Voter's Choice Act election model:

With the monumental 2020 Presidential election completed, much of the heavy lifting has been accomplished to transition to the Voters' Choice Act on a permanent basis. The new infrastructure has been purchased and put into place, new procedures have been developed. Grant funding, both from Federal CARES Act funding and State election grants had underwritten the equipment acquisition and additional staffing to implement the new system in record time for the November 2020 Election. However, if the Board directs staff to continue with this model moving forward in future elections, there are ongoing costs associated with this election model that exceed the status quo budget, as described in more detail below.

The large volume of ballots submitted by drop box has necessitated acquiring larger VBM drop boxes for future elections. Recommended are ones designed specifically for ballots, larger storage capacity, higher visibility, and permanently installed to enhance ballot security. This request is made in the Acquisition and Implementation section of the detailed budget below and would be fully offset by State funding if purchased before June 30, 2021.

The "Votemobile": Three standalone full service mobile voter service centers are recommended, following Santa Cruz County's successful use of a converted food truck trailer. Outfitted with the equipment used at the voter service center to check in voters and print a ballot, plus a generator, the Votemobile can be deployed to underserved areas or as an emergency measure in the case of a power outage or building evacuation. While these mobile voting units are not required to comply with the VCA, their use brings about greater flexibility and back-up in emergencies. It is highly recommended that the department procure three units to serve areas that did not have a voting location last November. Areas such as Cayucos, San Miguel, Shandon, Creston, and Santa Margarita would have a place to vote in their communities on designated days.

It should be noted that the Clerk-Recorder has received direction from the State that the Ballot Drop Off boxes and Votemobiles would be fully reimbursable by the State if purchased before June 30, 2021. And it should be noted that legislative and Secretary of State efforts are currently in motion to potentially provide additional funding to counties implementing the VCA for the first time which can then off-set General Fund support expenses noted below. Updates will be provided as information becomes available.

VCA (All Mail Elections with Vote Centers)

Cost Projection Highlights	Vote Center Model
Acquisition and Implementation Costs:	Completed (\$0)
Purchase of Permanent, High Volume VBM Ballot Drop-Off Boxes	\$75,000
Installation and Pick-Up	\$25,000
Purchase of replacement high-volume envelope openers	\$120,000
Purchase of 3 "Votemobile" Mobile Vote Center Trailers	\$250,000
Total One-Time Costs	\$470,000
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fully Reimbursable by Grant Funding if purchased by 6/30/2125% County matching funds required if purchased after 7/1/21 (\$117,500)	

Ongoing Costs each Election (Highlights):	
VBM Costs (Costs to Send and Process Returned VBM)	\$30,000
Rental of Polling Places vs Vote Centers over Multiple Days	\$15,000
Staffing Vote Centers	\$33,000
Assistance from IT Interns:	3000 Hours @ \$15/hr
6 at 500 Hours Each (Set-Up, Support, Breakdown)	\$45,000
2 Required Outreach Mailings regarding Vote Centers (Each: \$16k Card/Addressing, \$48k Postage)	\$128,000
Consultant for Voter Education and Outreach	\$35,000
TV/Radio/Newspaper/Digital Ads, Social Media Posts	\$30,000
IT Project Manager (.5 FTE) – manage schedule and coordinate all election activities, especially those pertaining to in-person voting preparation, delivery, support, return and inventory of equipment from locations to warehouse	\$52,500
IT Specialist (.5 FTE) – for additional technology preparation, support, inventory, storage, and maintenance	\$49,000
Additional Ongoing Cost to Conduct Elections under SB450 (General Fund)	\$417,500

Notes & Assumptions:

- Costs are above what is already included in the FY 2021-22 recommended budget.
- No further technology equipment is required.
- Permanently installed, high-volume VBM drop boxes would be purchased and installed with existing State Grant Funding. Utilizing Drop Boxes was the most popular method of submitting VBM ballots. The larger drop boxes will be able to hold more capacity and provide additional security.
- Voter Education and Outreach: It is surmised the efforts to inform voters of the changes for the November election with social media appearances, television/radio/social media and digital ads provided the constant reminders to voters helped drive the record levels of voter registration, turnout, and voting method shift to VBM. This was the first time a robust program was formally instituted and was widely recognized for its effectiveness. A somewhat reduced program is proposed (\$65,000 instead of \$80,000) for a smaller-scale election (\$65,000 vs \$80,000 in 2020).
- VBM Costs – With Permanent VBM & Mail Ballot Precincts amounting to 84% of all registered votes, the additional costs to send to remaining voters and process them are minimally impacted during a Gubernatorial Primary election.
- The voting locations and election worker staffing for the requisite 10- and 4-day voting periods increase the costs of In Person Voting. To curb some costs, 19-20 locations would be implemented (instead of 23 in November 2020), and new strategies will be sought for pollworker staffing levels and compensation to reflect expected turnout.
- The election department plans to utilize IT interns from Cuesta College and/or Cal Poly to help contain the high costs of technology implementation incurred during last November's election for equipment preparation, set-up, installation, support, and breakdown under the guidance of the Elections IT Team.
- The two required Outreach Mailers are requirements for counties under SB450. It does provide some opportunities for additional voter education and outreach as well as helping to maintain voter rolls with in-county and out-of-county moves and help off-set undeliverable VBM ballots during their initial mailing. Note: Outreach mailers were not required during the November 2020 election due to expediency for the changes to the November election.

Public Sentiment about Election Models (Survey)

The Voter Survey asked if a voter preferred to vote by mail, or in person; 82% of all respondents said they prefer to vote by mail, as opposed to 18% said they preferred to vote in person. These numbers directly correlate to the county's current 82% of all registered voters listed as permanent Vote by Mail. Some of the reasons given by those who prefer to vote by mail were convenience, time efficiency, an absence of feeling rushed or pressured at the polls, no traveling needed, demanding work schedules, and above all else, most feel voting by mail is both private and secure. Of those who prefer to vote in person, reasons stated include a feeling of participating in the process, bringing the community together, tradition, and security.

When posed with the question "if you had to vote in person, would you prefer to vote at a polling place (vote on Election Day only at assigned neighborhood polling place, approximately 75 polling places) or at a voter service center (4 locations open for 10 days, 20 locations open for 4 days, vote at any voter service center)?", 56.6% of respondents said they prefer to vote at a voter service center, and 43.4% said they prefer a neighborhood polling place.

Alternatives Considered:

Should the VCA not be adopted, the only alternative for the County is to return to the polling place election operation. To this end, the department recommends that it continue to procure the high volume VBM ballot drop boxes, institute a voter education and outreach program, and to raise Pollworker pay rates (which would be brought before your board at a later date). The last time the Board of Supervisors established Pollworker stipends was in 2002 and is in dire need of an update.

Regardless of whether Voter Service Centers or Polling Places are to be utilized for future elections it is highly recommended that the Clerk-Recorder be permitted to acquire the permanent, high volume VBM ballot drop boxes to keep up with voter trends, thereby saving the County the return postage costs, and to provide additional security for VBM ballots. Furthermore, the existing envelope opening equipment is in need of replacement so it is recommended to approve this purchase. New openers include features which increase reliability and productivity.

A robust voter education and outreach program had never been implemented in the Elections division in the past. A modest investment in a contract employee and a advertising budget, or a more committed investment in a FTE is preferred to invest additional training to fully utilize this staff member so it can be fully integrated into the department to serve in multiple capacities.

It should be noted that SB29 passed in the state legislature with urgency, which extends the requirement to mail every registered voter a ballot in the mail with ballot tracking through 2021. AB37 is advancing through the legislature to require this for all future elections.

Request for Board Direction

Summary of differences between Polling Place and VCA models:

	Polling Place	VCA
VBM	Only Perm VBM & MB Precincts	All Voters
	All other Voters must Request VBM	
	Replacement VBM Ballots Available Only at Election Offices	Replacement VBM Ballots Available at Election Offices and Voter Service Centers
	Sample Ballot Booklets required for non-VBM voters + Voter Information Guides for VBM voters	Only VBM Voter Information Guides required (earlier mailing of VBM ballots)
In Person Voting	1 Day of Voting	4 to 10 Days of Voting
	76 Locations	20 Locations (2 Offices, 2 for 10 days, 16 for 4 days) Votemobiles for Underserved Areas
	1000 Pollworkers (Stipend)	350 Election Workers (Hourly)
Voters	Assigned Polling Places	Voters Can Go to Any Location
	Static Paper Roster	Live Access to State Voter Database
	Require Voter to Go to Assigned Poll or Vote Provisionally	More Effectively Detects & Prevents Double Voting
Provisional Voting	Large Numbers of Provisional Ballots	Large Reduction of Provisional Voting
	Use of Call Center Mitigated This in March	Vote Center Application (Void VBM & Issue Live Ballot)
Ballots	Pre-Printed Ballots	Ballot on Demand Printing
	Provisionals vote on Precinct Ballot or with ICX Ballot Marking Machine	The correct ballot is printed for the voter
	Unvoted Ballots are One-Time Use	No wasted ballots. Unused ballot stock can be used for future elections

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT/IMPACT

The Clerk-Recorder had worked with IT Department staff when implementing election and reached out to member of the public regarding the survey and potential VCA implementation.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The FY 2021-22 recommended budget for the Clerk's Recorder includes funds to continue with the status quo polling place model. Dependent on the Board direction to staff, estimated General Fund Support expense for Voters Choice Act model is summarized below, taking into consideration grant funding to off-set acquisition and implementation costs.

Option 1: Full SB450 Implementation for FY 2021-22

Total one-time expenses offset by revenue: \$470,000

Total on-going expense and General Fund Support impact: \$417,500

Note: this assumes no additional revenue is allocated from the State.

Alternative: Enhance Current Polling Place Operations for FY 2021-22

(1) Voter Outreach and Education: \$65,000

(2) Pollworker Payroll Increase: \$25,000

(3) VBM Ballot Drop Off Boxes:

Purchase High Volume Drop Boxes: \$100,000 off-set by grant funding

Staffing for VBM Ballot Pick-Up: \$5,000 per election

Alternative total: \$195,000

RESULTS

With Board support and approval, provide voters of the County of San Luis Obispo the best possible voting experience for future elections in a cost-efficient manner.

ATTACHMENTS

1 Power Point Presentation